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SeaWorld Orlando to Return Rehabilitated Manatee to Tampa Bay Waters

Orlando, Florida (March 4, 2015) – Earlier today, SeaWorld Orlando's Animal Rescue Team, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service), the Florida Fish and Wildlife Commission (FWC), and the US Geological Survey (USGS) returned Trinidad, a male Florida manatee, to the waters of Tampa Bay, Fla. With the manatee weighing more than 1,000 pounds, it took a collaboration of 11 people to carry the animal into the water.

Trinidad, a male manatee who originally traveled from Florida to the Texas coast, was rescued by a number of members of the Texas Marine Mammal Stranding Network, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), Texas Parks and Wildlife Department, SeaWorld San Antonio and an expert from the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission (FWC), on November 25, 2014. A deputy with the Chambers County Sheriff's Office found him swimming in the cold waters of the NRG Energy power plant outflow in Trinity Bay near Houston.

At the time of rescue, he weighed 960 pounds and was showing signs of cold stress, malnourishment and dehydration. The male manatee received the name Trinidad, a Spanish translation of Trinity, because of the location where he was found: Trinity Bay.

USFWS requested Trinidad be transferred to SeaWorld San Antonio, where he received medical treatment and rehabilitation, including antibiotics, tube feeding and other supportive care. Following three months of rehabilitation, SeaWorld's Animal Rescue Team, with the help of the U.S. Coast Guard, transported the manatee to SeaWorld Orlando last month for further care in preparation for his return.

Researchers determined that he is a known manatee from Tampa Bay, first observed there in December 2001. Trinidad was identified through the Manatee Individual Photo-identification System, a photographic catalog of scarred Florida manatees developed by USGS, and maintained in partnership with FWC and Mote Marine Laboratory. His travel so far west in the Gulf has prompted USGS to tag, monitor, and track his movements for a study being conducted for the Bureau of Ocean Energy Management, and in cooperation with state, federal and local agencies, to understand manatee habitat use and movement patterns in the northern Gulf of Mexico. USGS placed a satellite-monitored GPS tag on Trinidad today prior to his return. After being medically cleared for today's return Trinidad weighed 1035 lbs. and measured 10 feet long.

“We’re really pleased to return Trinidad back to his home. His return today is the culmination of months of hard work by SeaWorld, the Service, and our many partners who assist with manatee rescues” said Jim Valade, the Service’s lead for manatee conservation activities.

“Today marks a huge milestone for Trinidad,” said Chris Bellows, SeaWorld San Antonio’s Vice President of Zoological Operations. “It has been a great team effort and the real reward is seeing this animal back in his home waters in Florida.”

In collaboration with government agencies and stranding networks, SeaWorld Parks & Entertainment operates one of the world’s most respected programs to rescue ill and injured marine animals, with the goal to rehabilitate and return them to their natural environment. SeaWorld animal experts have helped more than 24,000 animals in need – ill, injured, orphaned and abandoned – for more than five decades. As part of the Manatee Rescue and Rehabilitation Partnership (MRP), SeaWorld Orlando is an acute care rehabilitation facility that provides life-saving medical care to rescued manatees.

The USFWS is the lead Federal agency charged with recovering the endangered manatee. Service partners, such as the SeaWorld, FWC, and USGS are an integral part of efforts to conserve this species. These partners, members of the Service’s MRP, assist with the rescue of dozens of injured and distressed manatees each year and with other recovery efforts. The MRP is a cooperative group of non-profit, private, state, and federal entities who work together to monitor the health and survival of rehabilitated and released manatees. Information about manatees currently being tracked is available at www.manateerescue.org.

The HC-144A Ocean Sentry aircraft used for this transport is based out of Mobile, Alabama, and is part of the Coast Guard’s medium range surveillance aircraft fleet.

All manatee return footage produced by SeaWorld under FWS Permit Number MA7701911.

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